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Patent Application

for

NON-INTRUSIVE INSPECTION IMPULSE RADAR ANTENNA

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NON-INTRUSIVE INSPECTION IMPULSE RADAR ANTENNA

Technical Field

[0001] The present invention pertains to a high-bandwidth and high-frequency non-intrusive inspection radar system, and, more particularly, to a radar system having features providing for a low self-signature, referred to, herein, as a low radar cross section (LRC).

Background Art

[0002] Very high-frequency emitting radar antennas have been used in the detection of land mines or other concealed objects. As used herein, the term ‘very high frequency’ refers to radar systems employing at least some frequency components in a range in excess of 30 MHz. Moreover, while radar systems, and the invention described herein, may advantageously be employed for a wide variety of non-intrusive inspection (NII) applications, including, without limitation, narcotics detection, bomb detection, buried cable and pipe detection, motion detection, corpse detection, see-through-the wall technology, archaeology, geophysics, etc., the invention is described, herein, in terms of a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) system for the detection of landmines, with no intent of limitation.

[0003] In certain applications, such as those of GPR, proximity of the emitting antenna to the ground is known to be beneficial (particularly, proximity on the order of 30 centimeters or less) by virtue of reducing radar footprint on the ground and thereby improving the intensity of the signal that is reflected by the buried object. However, when the antenna is located near the ground or other objects, undesired reflections may appear between the antenna and the ground or other objects. Multiple reflections result in interference referred to as “clutter”. These multiple reflections are primarily a function of the following: distance between the antenna and the ground, the presence of other objects in the vicinity of the antenna, roughness of the terrain, the angle of the antenna, and the radar reflectivity of the antenna and its components. These multiple reflections interfere and mask the reflected signatures

of the buried objects and are referred to as 'clutter'. It is extremely beneficial to have system components that minimize this clutter.

Summary of the Invention

[00004] In accordance with preferred embodiments of the present invention, a method is provided for detecting objects buried beneath a surface of a medium. The method has the following steps:

- a. providing a plurality of antennas coupled into an array, each antenna characterized by a feed;
- b. drawing the plurality of antennas across the surface;
- c. radiating a plurality of transmitted pulses of electromagnetic radiation at periodic intervals of time;
- d. receiving the plurality of pulses in the array of antennas after interaction with the medium;
- e. forming pulses synchronous with the transmitted pulses by means of a pulse former disposed at the feed of each antenna;
- f. sampling the plurality of pulses by a sampling circuit, the sampling circuit disposed at the feed of each antenna so as to create an equivalent-time pulse signal; and
- g. subtracting a self-signature of each antenna from the equivalent-time pulse signal so as to detect features of objects buried beneath the surface of the medium.

[00005] In accordance with alternate embodiments of the invention, the step of providing a plurality of antennas may include stacking low-radar cross-section members, and, more particularly, stacking plastic sheets. Plastic sheets may also be adhered to high-strength structural members. Sampling the plurality of pulse may include disposing only a pulse former, receiving diode, integrating capacitor, and impedance converter at the feed of each antenna.

[00006] In accordance with further embodiments of the invention, methods are provided for manufacturing a broadband antenna that include depositing a conductive film along a dielectric member in such a manner that the impedance of the conducting film is a

continuous function of length along the dielectric member, and electrically coupling a sampling circuit to the conducting film at a feedpoint of the broadband antenna. The step of depositing a conductive film may include sputtering a resistive layer of a conducting metal.

[00007] In accordance with yet other embodiments of the invention, a receiver is provided for an impulse radar system that is characterized by a strobe pulse. The receiver has a broadband antenna having a feed, and a low-radar cross-section front-end module coupled directly to the feed of the antenna. The front-end module includes only a pulse former, a receiving diode, an integrating element, and a impedance matching element. The receiver has a transmission line having a proximal end coupled to the front-end module and a distal end, and a processor coupled to the distal end of the transmission line for analyzing signals received from the front end module. The integrating element may be a capacitor, and the broadband antenna may be characterized by a resistivity per-unit-length where the resistivity per-unit-length increases with distance from the feed. More particularly, the resistivity per-unit-length may increase linearly with distance from the feed.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[00008] The foregoing features of the invention will be more readily understood by reference to the following detailed description, taken with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 depicts one embodiment of a low radar cross section antenna array deployed on a motorized vehicle in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention and alternate antenna configurations;

Fig. 2A is a basic circuit block diagram of a low-radar cross-section sampling system in accordance with embodiments of the invention;

Fig. 2B is a circuit diagram of a low-radar cross-section sampling system showing components located at the antenna feed in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 3 depicts impulse and signal trains in accordance with the embodiment of Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 depicts the construction of an antenna array, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention; and

Fig. 5 illustrates the self-signature removal process, in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description of Specific Embodiments

[00009] The problem of multiple reflection clutter-signals, discussed above, is advantageously reduced, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention, by employing antennas having a low radar cross-section, ideally a radar cross section of zero. In accordance with the present invention, a low radar cross section is achieved while retaining an effective search capacity. The antenna's advantages additionally include its cost-effectiveness and its reduced use of materials and production capacity.

[00010] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, highly resistive, low-metal-content, antenna arms are employed, as now described with reference to Fig. 1. In preferred embodiments of the invention, a resistive tapered-Vee antenna **1**, characterized by low metal content, is employed. In preferred embodiments of the invention, the impedance of the antenna is governed by the deposition, typically by sputtering, of a thin film of conductor, such as gold. This process is preferred due both to the high homogeneity of the resultant impedance and the tailorability of the impedance by prescribing the geometry of the deposited film. In particular, the impedance may be tapered, increasing along each leg of a vee antenna, so as to create a resistively tapered vee (RTV) antenna. The taper is preferably linear, so as to vary impedance gradually, thereby reducing reflection across a broad spectral band. Further description of the use of a resistively tapered vee antenna in mine detection may be found in Montoya et al., "Land Mine Detection Using a Ground-Penetrating radar Based on Resistively Loaded Vee Dipoles", IEEE Transactions on Antennas and Propagation, vol. 47, pp. 1795-1806, (December, 1999), which is incorporated herein by reference.

[00011] In order to reduce spurious reflections and clutter, preferred embodiments of the present invention relate to transmission line **3**, coupling feedbox **2** (which is disposed at the feedpoint of antenna **1**) to multiplexer and subsequent processor module **4**. In accordance with these embodiments of the invention, transmission line **3**, which may include coaxial

cables or other transmission media, is rigidly attached to a flat surface so as to maintain transmission line elements in parallelism.

[00012] Other antenna configurations, such as a resistive dipole **5**, rod **6**, spiral **7**, or exponential stripline, are all examples within the scope of the present invention as claimed, each exhibiting advantages and disadvantages for application in specified circumstances. The use of the vee configuration of Fig. 1 for both the transmitting and receiving antennas is advantageous for ground penetrating applications because the vee's focus and field of view are primarily into the ground, thereby reducing the signals reflected by the framework that holds the antenna. High resistivity of the antenna may be achieved through use of such resistive materials as carbon, graphite plastic, ceramic, a plastic that is coated with an extremely thin layer of conducting material, or a similarly coated foam material. Fig. 1a depicts antennas formed into an array within a structure that may be referred to herein as a 'carcass'.

[00013] The antenna arms typically employed in this invention are highly inefficient radiators of signals because they are so highly resistive, having extremely low gain in both transmission and reception. A sampling technology employed in processing the received signals is therefore preferably extremely sensitive. Yet, it is also preferably characterized by an extremely low-radar-cross section so as to minimize clutter caused by components of the antenna structure.

[00014] General principles of sampling technology are described, for example, in the Tektronix Technique Primer 47W-7209, October, 1989), incorporated herein by reference. In typical sampling practice, precision is sought in the measurement of voltages versus time value without regard for the radar cross section of the circuitry. As used herein, unless otherwise indicated, the term "precision" will refer to the accuracy to which a voltage is measured at a specified instant with respect to onset of a return pulse.

[00015] In accordance with the current invention, innovative sampling technology is employed for the first time that is both extremely sensitive, and that provides a ratio of signal

to clutter and of signal to noise that cannot be achieved using methods known in the art. This achievement is made at the expense of 'precision' but precision is less important for non-intrusive inspection system applications. In accordance with techniques of the present invention, the radar cross section of the sampling electronics may advantageously be as much as three orders of magnitude lower than that achieved in prior technology.

[00016] Certain features whereby the performance heretofore described may be achieved are now described with reference to Figs. 2A, 2B, and 3. As shown in Fig. 2A, a capacitor **17** is connected to receiving diode **16** and is used as an integrator. Use of a minimal number of components, coupled with subminiature surface-mounting technology allows a smaller cross-section than may be achieved using known technology. No separate source of voltage for biasing the receiving diode is necessary since the synchronous input is DC-coupled and biased to the requisite level externally to the sampling circuit that is located at the antenna feed.

[00017] In accordance with the present invention, the pulse input to the sampling circuit of Figs. 2A and 2B is provided on-board a receiver feedpoint circuitry board **120** by circuitry referred to herein as a 'pulse former.' The pulse former includes a modulated gate pulse generator **15** that uses, in certain embodiments, a simple low-component count step-recovery diode (SRD) method. Thus, the pulse input need be merely a modulated square wave. A step-recovery diode **D1** (shown in Fig. 2B) conducts briefly in the reverse direction and then cutoff abruptly, allowing for the generation of extremely sharp pulse edges. Shunt inductance **L1** (shown in Fig. 2B) further sharpens the leading edges of the pulses used to strobe the sampling gate. Use of an SRD for pulse generation in a sampling context is described, for example, by Whiteley, et al., "50 GHz Sampler Hybrid Utilizing a Small Shockline and an Internal SRD," IEEE Microwave Theory & Technique-S Digest, pp. 895-898 (1991), incorporated herein by reference. Thus, neither a bias voltage nor amplifiers and associated components are provided at the feedpoint. In their place are FET transistors **T1** and **T2** (shown in Fig. 2B) which typically exhibit no voltage gain and act as impedance converters, taking the high source impedance of diode **16** and capacitor **17** and provide a low source

impedance for transmission away from the feedpoint to the input, at the multiplexer box at a remote location, of the differential amplifiers.

[00018] A trigger generator, such as square wave trigger generator **10**, triggers generation of a pulse by a high-bandwidth signal generator **11**. The bandwidth of the system is limited by a convolution of the bandwidths of the transmitted impulse signal, the bandwidth of the resistive antennas, and the bandwidth of the receiver circuitry. The probe pulses, amplified and transmitted by the transmitter amplifier and antenna **124** are propagated into the transfer medium, which includes the air, the ground **128**, and any potential targets **130**. Both impulse generator **11** and transmitter amplifier **124** together constitute the transmitter feedpoint circuitry **122**. The high frequency signal received by antenna **126** is attenuated (due primarily to $\sim r^{-2}$ decrement of both radiated flux and antenna sensitivity) and contains noise (typically dominated, in a well-designed system, by ambient electromagnetic radiation sources, whether natural or man-made, or due to thermal noise generation within the system).

[00019] Phase modulator **13** is also triggered by the square wave generator **10**. A low-frequency sawtooth generator **14** feeds the phase modulator **13**, with the sawtooth waveform controlling the depth of modulation. A modulated impulse converter **15** takes the modulated square waves and converts them to modulated impulses. Upon reception of the pulses returned through transfer medium **12**, capacitor **17** becomes charged by the signal that is passed by the receiving diode **16**. Impedance match **18** couples prior parts of the circuit to low-pass filter and amplifier **19** that outputs the low-frequency representation of the high bandwidth signal with a high signal to noise and clutter ratio.

[00020] Referring now to Fig. 3, the square wave output **20** of square wave generator **10** simultaneously triggers the high-bandwidth semiconductor-based signal source **11** and the signal phase modulator **13**. While the sawtooth wave has a period that is equal to the low frequency representation of the received signal, during one period of the sawtooth wave, there are thousands of transmitted and received impulses. The time between the receiver trigger impulses is related to the instantaneous voltage of the sawtooth wave during that impulse. This causes the modulation and allows the high frequency signal to be sampled and

“stretched out” into the low frequency representation. The low frequency sawtooth generator **14** causes the signals in phase modulator **13** to be repeatedly and incrementally stretched in time by fractions of the signal source’s **10** period. The control signal for the modulation of the signal **20** generates the modulated square wave signal **22**.

[00021] At the same time, the generated drive voltage **10** is led to the phase modulator stage **13** which is also fed by a low frequency sawtooth signal **14**. Both signals are processed by the phase modulator stage **13** such that their output shows a rectangular voltage resembling that generated at **10** but with modulation, where this modulation or slight delay is a very small fraction of the signal source’s period **11**.

[00022] Modulated square wave **22** is converted by the modulated impulse converter **15** to a modulated strobe pulse **23**. Modulated strobe pulse **23**, in turn, is added to the signal **21** received from the antenna arms, with the modulated strobe pulse acts as a sampler, and is fed to the receiving diode **16**. Receiving diode **16** passes some portion of this combined voltage **24**, where the combined voltage is the modulated strobe pulse **23** plus the sampled points of the high bandwidth signal **21**.

[00023] The sampled portions of the received signal **21** are located in the illustration by the dotted lines **27** that intersect with the high-bandwidth signal **21**. The passed signal **24** charges the capacitor **17**. This signal across the capacitor **17** is coupled to subsequent amplifiers and electronics by means of impedance matcher **18**. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, impedance matcher **18** is a field-effect transistor (FET) that presents a very high impedance input to avoid attenuating the extremely high source impedance received signal. The FET transmits a low source impedance signal to outputs **B3**, **B4**, and up a coaxial cable (not shown) to subsequent low input impedance amplifiers **19** in order to reduce noise during this transmission. The resulting charge and discharge produces the saw-tooth-like wave signal **25**. The dotted line over the saw-tooth-like wave **25** is produced by the amplifier **19**, which also filters out the high frequency saw tooth. The resulting signal **26** is a low frequency representation of the high-bandwidth signal **21**.

[00024] This sampling technology is by its nature well-suited to make low radar cross-section, since only a minimal number of components are disposed on a printed circuit board at the feed point of antenna arms **2**. Only the modulated impulse converter **15**, the receiver diode **16**, the integrating capacitor **17**, and impedance matcher **18**, along with associated passive components, are disposed at the antenna feed, whereas all prior art sampling receivers have incorporated these components integrally with the receiver that has included amplification and multiplexing electronics. The pulse generator **15** is integrally co-located with the sampling circuitry to eliminate problems associated high frequency/high bandwidth transmission lines. Moreover, the steepness of the leading edge of the strobe pulse, received at input **B1**, is steepened by shunting with inductor **L1** (shown in Fig. 2B). This provides a greater bandwidth than would be provided if the strobe pulse were to be generated remotely and transmitted to the sampling circuit at the antenna feed by means of a transmission line.

[00025] The prior paragraphs describe the receiving antenna. Preferred embodiments of the current invention also includes a low radar cross-section transmitter. The transmitter antenna **124** and its feedpoint circuitry **122** are made low radar cross section by moving only a small semiconductor-based pulse generator **11** at the feed point of the antenna arm **1** or arms, depicted by module **2** of Fig. 1.

[00026] As shown in Fig. 2B, some embodiments of the present invention remain LRC but are improved with a push-pull arrangement that replaces the diode **16** and capacitor **17** with the respective pairs **D1/C2** and **D3/C3**. This advantageously further reduce the signal to noise ratio. In this embodiment as well, only these components which are necessary at the feedpoint are disposed there, thereby advantageously providing a minimal radar cross section.

[00027] In most instances, it is important for the invention to be structurally strong while remaining low radar cross section for some distance from the non-LRC components. One example of the current invention in an array configuration is shown in Figure 4. This is a composite laminate configuration but other configurations are also suitable. Other suitable

configurations would be a truss structure that is filled with air or other suitable LRC filler such as injected foam.

[00028] Referring now to Fig. 4, an embodiment of the carcass of the GPR system is shown, including dielectric antenna arms **41**. Antenna arms **41** are connected to the LRC transmitter or receiver components **42**, also shown as item 2 of Fig. 1. Transmitter or receiver components **42** receive trigger signals and return data by way of low impedance wires **43**. The wires **43**, with the term 'wires' used in a general sense to encompass any transmission-line means, are connected to remaining non-LRC portions of the invention.

[00029] The array and carcass are fabricated by stacking low radar cross-section sheets of plastic **45** with the adhered electronic components **41**, **42**, and **43**. Sheets of LRC plastic foam separate the LRC sheets of plastic. The LRC plastic sheets protrude into an aluminum or high-strength plastic frame **48**. The LRC plastic sheets protrude into the plastic frame and are glued and bolted to angled metal or high strength plastic members **47**.

[00030] Even though the GPR system is made of low radar cross-section materials in accordance with the present invention, it still has some self-signature. While most of the self signature is due to cross talk and direct coupling between transmitters and receivers, some of the steady state self signature is due to internal reflections. This self-signature confounds the signals that are returned by the environment or targets that are being examined. Direct reflections from non LRC components may advantageously be effectively cancelled with self signature removal. The main benefit of LRC is that it eliminates multiple reflections between the ground and radar. The other important benefit of LRC is the reduction of multi-path interference, which can cause clutter and ringing effects after the returned impulse.

[00031] To combat the deleterious effects of a self-signature, a low frequency representation of the self-signature of the antenna or its environment is digitally stored, in accordance with the present invention. Subtraction of the self-signature of an antenna, whether in software or in digital hardware, so as to simplify the computing requirements for signal processing and display of the data, is within the scope of the present invention.

[00032] The self-signature removal and its advantage are illustrated in Figure 5. In accordance with preferred embodiments of the invention, the self-signature is removed by referencing a trigger **50** that begins each channel of data. The user or automated system causes the invention to store whatever signature is being returned by the array. Prior to storing a reference signature, the antenna is positioned in a reference position such as in the air so it is effectively pointed at nothing but air, then the resulting saved signature is simply the antenna array's self-signature **51**. The same procedure can be used to also save the self-signature plus the environment's signature. This procedure may be applied advantageously for a non-intrusive motion detector that might be employed in a see-through-the wall situation.

[00033] As the antenna is pointed at an object, the antenna sees the self-signature plus the target signature **52**. However, the invention aligns the digitally stored self-signature with the incoming signal **52** and subtracts the stored self signature to report the target signature **53**, only.

[00034] The described embodiments of the invention are intended to be merely exemplary and numerous variations and modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art. All such variations and modifications are intended to be within the scope of the present invention as defined in the appended claims.